

**DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION**

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HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1601**DECISION MEMO
ACTIONS OF A SPECIAL NATURE**

Fort Belknap Milk River Diversion Gate Automation Project
February 1, 2022
Fort Belknap Indian Community
Maintenance and Upgrade of Existing Facility
48.291147, -108.455639
Blaine County

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Fort Belknap Irrigation Project (FBIP) is a system of canals, laterals, and ditches located in the Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC) in North Central Montana in the Milk River Valley in Blaine and Phillips County. The main diversion for the FBIP is in the community of Fort Belknap, on the Milk River. Construction of the FBIP systems started after the Reservation was created in 1889 and the system has been in place and operational since that time. The FBIP facilitates all irrigation activities associated with the Milk River Diversion and the three (3) irrigation units within the boundaries of the FBIC.

The water delivery system of the FBIP provides irrigation water to approximately 9,000 acres and 43 farms and ranches. Water diverted at the Milk River Diversion structure enters the Main Canal A which delivers water the FBIP's 3 irrigation units. The Milk River Diversion is concrete structure constructed in the 1950's and located in the Fort Belknap Community. The gates are operated by the FBIP personnel by manually opening and closing the gates. The gates are additionally controlled by installing or removing checkboards as required by demand within the irrigation system. This requires daily trips to the diversion structure to 1) manually take measurements downstream within the canal to determine the required adjustment, and 2) make the necessary gate and checkboard adjustments to meet the required demand. This method of water diversion is often untimely and inefficient and results in the unnecessary diversion of excess water.

The Fort Belknap Indian Community working with the Fort Belknap Irrigation Project proposes to replace the existing check boards within the concrete diversion structure with a new gate and actuators. The installation of a Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system will allow the FBIP to monitor and control the gates from a remote location, thus limiting excessive diversions from the Milk River, reduce travel to the diversion gate, and better assist the Project in the timely delivery of requested water.

Fort Belknap Indian Community will complete this project between February 1, 2022 and September 30, 2023.

The gate upgrade and automation of the Fort Belknap Irrigation Project diversion structure will result in the timely and adequate delivery of water. Remote monitoring and gate automation will result in the conservation of 784 million gallons of water from the Milk River.

Explanation of the decision(s) that must be made regarding the proposed action (i.e. approve grant or loan and provide funding):

DNRC will approve the grant to provide funding for the Fort Belknap Milk River Diversion Gate Automation Project.

DNRC is not required to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for actions that qualify for a CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION (ARM 36.17.614) or justified by a PROGRAMMATIC REVIEW; or are ACTIONS OF A SPECIAL NATURE (ARM 36.2.523(5)); or are EMERGENCIES (ARM 36.2.539). These actions are subject to review for EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES that would require an EA or an EIS.

ACTIONS OF SPECIAL NATURE (ARM 36.2.523)

☐ Administrative actions: routine, clerical or similar functions of a department, including but not limited to administrative procurement, contracts for consulting services, and personnel actions.

☒ Minor repairs, operations, or maintenance of existing equipment or facilities.

☐ Investigation and enforcement: data collection, inspection of facilities or enforcement of environmental standards.

☐ Ministerial actions: actions in which the agency exercises no discretion, but rather acts upon a given state of facts in a prescribed manner.

☐ Actions that are primarily social or economic in nature and that do not otherwise affect the human environment.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION/PROGRAMMATIC REVIEW

☐ Categorical Exclusion (CE) refers to a type of action which does not individually, collectively, or cumulatively require an EA or EIS, as determined by rulemaking or programmatic review adopted by the agency, unless extraordinary circumstances, as defined by rulemaking or programmatic review, occur. This project qualifies under ARM 36.17.614 CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS.

☐ Programmatic review means an analysis (EIS or EA) of the impacts on the quality of the human environment of related actions, programs, or policies. DNRC – CARDD does not have any programmatic reviews completed at the time of this template.

The project listed above meets the definition of Actions of a Special Nature, Categorical Exclusion or Programmatic Review including specified conditions and Extraordinary Circumstances.

Prepared By:	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 60%;"> Name: Ann L. Kulczyk Title: Grant Manager Email: akulczyk@mt.gov </div> <div style="width: 35%; text-align: right;"> Date: January 25, 2022 </div> </div>
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Approved By:	Name: Mark Bostrom
Signature: <i>Mark W Bostrom</i>	Title: CARD Division Administrator
Date: 1/26/2022 9:11:48 AM MST	

Project Area Map – Fort Belknap Indian Community

